behind them? All of those who were trying to help the Taliban were behind the assassination."

Yahya Massoud, the eldest of Ahmed Shah Massoud's brothers—he is fifty-two—took me on an overnight trip to the family's home town of Bazarak, in the Panjshir Valley, three hours northeast of Kabul. We travelled north across the Shamali plain, a once fertile valley of vineyards and orchards which stretches from Kabul all the way to the mountains where the Panjshir begins. The Taliban methodically destroyed the Shamali after they seized power in Kabul, in order to create a no man's land between the capital and Massoud's front line, which was near the northern end of the valley. The landscape is a green Arcadia beyond that point. The Taliban had made incursions into it but had never held the territory long enough to destroy it.

At the little market town of Charikar, we stopped to have lunch with General Bismillah Khan. Carpets were laid out under the trees around a pond. A birdcage with a white parakeet in it hung from one of the trees. Tea and bowls of *kishmish*—almonds and raisins and sweets—were served, and then we all filed into a long, L-shaped room, where we were shown to our places on cushions set around the walls. The entire floor was covered with tablecloths upon which a feast of Afghan dishes was arrayed: bowls of salad, rice pilaf with raisins and almonds, mutton, yogurt, soup, fruit, chicken and lamb, and basins full of tiny broiled quail, cooked whole. There must have been five hundred of them. The blackened cadavers rested in piles of scorched wings and feet and skulls and beaks and sunken eye sockets. Taking my cue from the men around me, I popped one in my mouth and began crunching. I found that after four or five vigorous jaw movements I was able to swallow the thing and be done with the experience.

After the feast, Bismillah Khan and his entourage returned to Kabul, and Yahya Massoud and I journeyed on into the Panjshir, which is really more of a canyon than a valley. At the mouth of the canyon, we drove through the small town of Gulbahar, where the two Arab terrorists had stayed, in one of Sayyaf's guesthouses.

In a couple of hours, we reached the promontory above Bazarak where Massoud is buried. An indented area in the hill was surrounded by a brick wall covered with a plastic-and-tin roof held up by stripped saplings. Inside, the tomb, which is a long dirt mound, was covered with a gold-brocaded burgundy cloth and surrounded by flowers in pots. We stopped there for a while, and Yahya told me of the family's plans to turn the burial place into a proper mausoleum complex and pilgrimage site.

A few hundred metres outside of Bazarak, the road drops down the mountainside toward the river. The Massoud family compound, a hamlet-sized collection of flat-roofed adobe buildings, is on a steep slope overlooking the water. We drove up to a sentry hut and past a modern, white-painted cement house that Yahya said belonged to one of his sisters, who lives in Holland. A young soldier at the hut saluted and lowered the rope barrier, and we continued up the muddy track and parked alongside Massoud's grandfather's house. A smaller whitewashed building that was attached to it had belonged to his father, an Afghan military officer who was killed in a car crash in 1993. Ahmed Shah Massoud was born there and had lived in the house for a time during the jihad, Yahya said. He used part of it as his headquarters.

A big rock wall topped with tin had been built into the steep hillside above their father's house. The wall formed a shining semicircle against the dark scree of the barren hill, enclosing a swath of terraced gardens that led to a modern, white house. Six or seven torrents of water arced gracefully down the hill from the house, bouncing from one terrace to another, and a stone pathway led up through a series of orange-colored latticed arbors. "This was the house Massoud was building for his family," said Yahya. "It was almost finished when he died." His wife and six children live in Iran now.

The house was a simple two-story structure made of concrete, but it had lots of windows and a glorious southern exposure. You could see a mulberry park below, and the curving river and the mountains beyond, and, in the distance, great craggy snowcapped peaks. We walked along a pathway that led past an orchard and went into Massoud's father's house. It had recently been modernized, and the concrete interior walls were painted a pale peach color. A single portrait hung on the wall. It was a pencil drawing of Massoud, smiling. That night, we slept on velveteen sleeping pads in the room where Massoud was born.

I met Bismillah Khan again in late May, at his base in Kabul. He shared it with a Swedish contingent of the I.S.A.F. He has an office on the rooftop of a building that has a rose garden and a lawn and a huge, sixties-style swimming pool. The Swedes were giving a Taste of Sweden barbecue when I arrived, and Bismillah Khan and his men were lined up with paper plates and plastic utensils to get their food. They were obviously ill at ease, and not a little offended, since at an Afghan feast a guest sits and is served.

Some of the Afghans didn't know how to eat with forks and knives, and those who did helped them. They whispered about what was on their plates: barbecued beef, chicken, potatoes, and bamboo shoots. They didn't know what bamboo was, and most of them didn't touch it. They had never eaten potatoes with the skins on. A few of the men cracked jokes in Dari about the meat, which they thought might be dog, or pork. Others said that it wasn't *halal*, that is, that a butcher had not uttered "God is great" when the animal's throat was cut.

At the end of the meal, the Swedish chef, a burly soldier, announced that he wanted to wish one of the other soldiers happy birthday, and, as was the custom in Sweden, he would present him with a gift. This was all translated to the Afghans, who were puzzled, since they don't celebrate birthdays. The chef unwrapped a bottle of whiskey and handed it to the soldier. "And now," the chef said, "our friend must share his gift, as is the custom in Afghanistan, with everyone here. It will take, I estimate, five minutes." And he laughed at his joke.

Two of Bismillah Khan's aides ran over to the Swede's translator and pointed out that this was a big mistake. Fridoun, my translator, muttered, "Don't they learn anything at all about Afghan culture before they come?" The whiskey bottle was removed, and Bismillah Khan, who had politely eaten everything on his plat during dinner, rose and thanked his hos and shook the officers' hands.

Later, in Bismillah Khan's office, asked him about one of the key elemen

in Sayyaf's explanation of his role in the matter of Massoud's assassination. Sayyaf had told me, and others, that he had warned Bismillah Khan and Massoud that the Arabs might be dangerous and that he didn't trust them. Bismillah Khan said only that Sayyaf had told Massoud that the Arabs seemed "strange." He became testy when pressed and said that I should talk to Sayyaf. He also said that he hadn't sent a car to pick up the Arabs. They had been picked up by Sayyaf's men. "Who brought them from the front line to Kabul?" I asked. "I don't know," Bismillah Khan said. "Maybe the Taliban."

The Arab assassins had been taken to Sayyaf's house and given tea, and were introduced to a man named Qazi Karamatullah Siddiq, who spoke Arabic and was assigned to accompany them while they were in the Panjshir. Siddiq is a Muslim scholar and a graduate in Sharia law from Dawa'a al-Jihad, Sayyaf's university near Peshawar. He now works in one of the ministries in the interim government, and I talked with him about the Arabs. Although Siddiq is a Sayyaf loyalist, he contradicted several of Sayyaf's recollections, most notably the one about the assassins almost getting into a meeting of Northern Alliance leaders in the Panjshir, supposedly to kill them all. This was a story that I had heard repeatedly as evidence that Sayyaf was not involved in the plot to kill Massoud, since he would have been killed himself. But Siddiq says that the Arabs never got near the meeting, because Sayyaf had refused, in advance, to give them permission. He says that Sayyaf then arranged for the Arabs to interview Massoud in Khoja Bahauddin. Siddiq also said that Sayyaf never mentioned any suspicions about the Arabs until after the assassination.

Conspiracy theories are given credence in Afghanistan not least because there have been, historically, a lot of conspiracies. The reigning political ethos is survival of the fittest, and alliances are fluid. Afghans are geographically isolated, xenophobic, and cynical from years of war. Sayyaf helped the assassins, and most of the people I spoke to who were close to Massoud—relatives, intelligence agents, military commanders—believe that he must have had some sense, if not explicit knowledge, of the assassins' plans. But he was only one—perhaps the final—link in a chain of people who made it possible for the two Arabs to get to Khoja Bahauddin with their sophisticated explosives and well-choreographed suicide plan. For instance, among the CDs and notebooks and verses from the Koran found in the Arabs' things after the assassination was a letter of recommendation written by the head of the Afghan Red Crescent Society (shocking documentation of the culture of complicity and appeasement that had developed between N.G.O.s and the Taliban). The stolen Belgian passports and letters of introduction from Yassir al-Sirri in London are part of a web of circumstantial evidence tying Massoud's assassins to Al Qaeda and, by inference, to the World Trade Center bombing. "These links are so strong," an Afghan intelligence agent close to the investigation of Massoud's death said to me, "that they leave no doubt to anyone in intelligence, with knowledge of terrorist organizations, and of Afghanistan, that the two events were connected."

One afternoon toward the end of May, I went to lunch at Wali Massoud's house. He had several guests, including a group of Afghan-American businessmen. One of them, who lives in Virginia and works for DynCorp, an American defense contractor, told me that he had been away for twenty-five years but was thinking of returning if he could do some business for his company.

Wali and I were able to talk for a few minutes in a corner, and I said to him that an Afghan intelligence officer had told me that, although several European intelligence agencies are investigating his brother's murder, there isn't much of an investigation taking place in Afghanistan.

"That's right," he said. "There is no investigation here at all."

I asked Wali if the intense preparations for the upcoming Loya Jirga were distracting people. I had been struck by the fact that Sayyaf seemed to be very involved in the dealmaking that was going on. Why would so many of those who revered Massoud be prepared to cut deals with a man who is suspected of betraying him?

"All of these people," Wali said, "are involved in politics." ♦



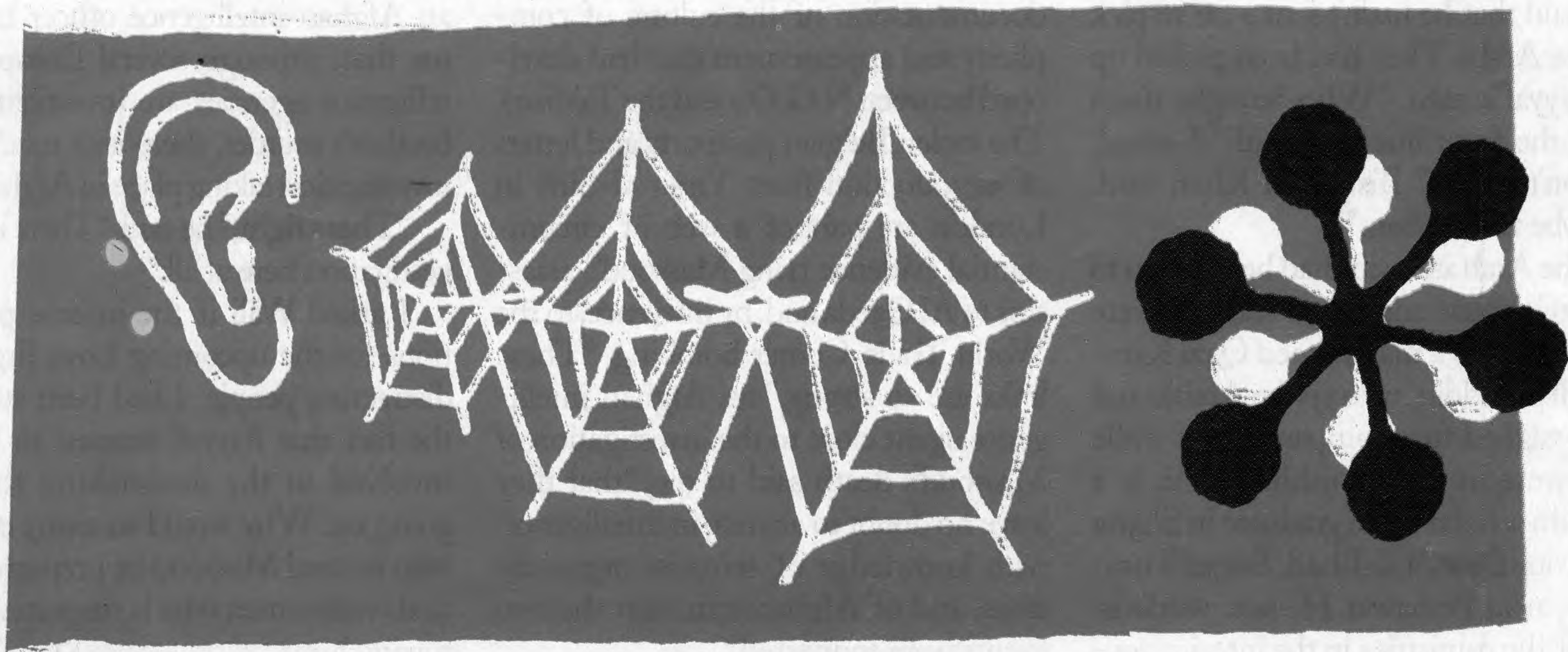
"I married for love. I divorced for money."



FICTION

A PRIMER FOR THE PUNCTUATION OF HEART DISEASE

BY JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER



□ The "silence mark" signifies an absence of language, and there is at least one on every page of the story of my family life. Most often used in the conversations I have with my grandmother about her life in Europe during the war, and in conversations with my father about our family's history of heart disease—we have forty-one heart attacks between us, and counting—the silence mark is a staple of familial punctuation. Note the use of silence in the following brief exchange, when my father called me at college, the morning of his most recent angioplasty:

"Listen," he said, and then surrendered to a long pause, as if the pause were what I was supposed to listen to. "I'm sure everything's gonna be fine, but I just wanted to let you know—"

"I already know," I said.

"□"

"□"

"□"

"□"

"O.K.," he said.

"I'll talk to you tonight," I said, and I could hear, in the receiver, my own heartbeat.

He said, "Yup."

■ The "willed silence mark" signifies an intentional silence, the conversational equivalent of building a wall over which you can't climb, through which you can't see, against which you break the bones of your hands and wrists. I often inflict willed silences upon my mother when she asks about my relationships with girls. Perhaps this is because I never have *relationships* with girls—only *relations*. It depresses me to think that I've never had sex with anyone who really loved me. Sometimes I wonder if having sex with a girl who doesn't love me is like felling a tree, alone, in a forest: no one hears about it; it didn't happen.

?? The "insistent question mark" denotes one family member's refusal to yield to a willed silence, as in this conversation with my mother:

"Are you dating at all?"

"□"

"But you're seeing people, I'm sure. Right?"

"□"

"I don't get it. Are you ashamed of the girl? Are you ashamed of me?"

"■"

"??"

¡ As it visually suggests, the "unxclamation point" is the opposite of an exclamation point; it indicates a whisper.

The best example of this usage occurred when I was a boy. My grandmother was driving me to a piano lesson, and the Volvo's wipers only moved the rain around. She turned down the volume of the second side of the seventh tape of an audio version of "Shoah," put her hand on my cheek, and said, "I hope that you never love anyone as much as I love you¡"

Why was she whispering? We were the only ones who could hear.

¡¡ Theoretically, the "extraunxclamation points" would be used to denote twice an unxclamation point, but in practice any whisper that quiet would not be heard. I take comfort in believing that at least some of the silences in my life were really extraunxclamations.

!! The "extraexclamation points" are simply twice an exclamation point. I've never had a heated argument with any member of my family. We've never yelled at each other, or disagreed with any passion. In fact, I can't even remember a difference of opinion. There are those who would say that this is unhealthy. But, since it is the case, there exists only one instance of extraexclamation points in our family history, and they were uttered by a stranger who was vying with my father for a parking space in front of the National Zoo.

"Give it up, fucker!!" he hollered at my father, in front of my mother, my brothers, and me.

As if he had willed it, for the next hour few phones beeped, no major news erupted. Raines didn't look at the notes he had scrawled on yellow paper as he said, "I was reminded today of the words of Mississippi's greatest moral philosopher, Dizzy Dean, who said, 'It ain't braggin' if you really done it!' Ladies and gentlemen of the New York *Times*, you've really done it!" Raines spoke about his predecessors in the newsroom—"We are living links in an unbroken chain of commitment"—and singled out Joe Lelyveld and Bill Keller. Applause filled the room as Lelyveld, who was leaning against a file cabinet next to Sulzberger, Sr., smiled demurely. Raines called Sulzberger, Jr., "a great publisher," and gave him a bear hug as the room applauded again.

Sulzberger asked the room to fall silent out of respect for the victims of September 11th and its aftermath, including journalists like Daniel Pearl, of the *Wall Street Journal*, who was murdered by Islamic terrorists. When he spoke again, he said, "Howell mentioned a lot of the folks on whose shoulders we stand, but he forgot one"—deliberately, Raines later said—"and I'm grateful that he did, and that is my father." The applause reached its peak, and the older Sulzberger had no place to hide, which is clearly what he wanted to do; the gray, slightly stooped patriarch, who had a bright-red ribbon looped around his neck holding an I.D. badge, blushed and engaged in nervous chatter with another painfully shy man, Lelyveld. At most newspapers, publishers are the ones responsible for cutbacks that boost profit margins. At the *Times*, the Sulzbergers are royalty.

Roger Cohen, who had recently been promoted to foreign editor, introduced Barry Bearak, whose stories from Afghanistan won a Pulitzer for international reporting. After thanking Celia Dugger, his wife and the co-chief of the New Delhi bureau, Bearak said, "I've read a great many wonderful stories that didn't make the Pulitzer Prizes; many of them were written by people who are in this room, many of them were written by my colleagues who were in Afghanistan this year."

C. J. Chivers was one of those colleagues in Afghanistan, but he had never met Bearak, because they travelled separate roads. But as he stood listening to him he was moved. "I'll remember this as long as I have a memory," he said. "After everything he had been through and has done for the newspaper and the risks he's taken, he was talking about the larger institution, and not himself."



"I'm sorry, Timothy, but there's no use suing over spilt milk, either."

• •

Jon Landman stood to accept the Public Service Prize awarded to the section A Nation Challenged, which included its daily "Portraits of Grief." He spoke briefly, then raised a plastic champagne cup and said, "Make a toast to whoever is standing next to you, and to yourself."

All the nervousness about the executive editor took a vacation on that afternoon. "What a day. I'm so proud of you all. I'm so proud of us," Raines said when he returned to the platform. He recalled the advice that Landman had offered about what he should say. " 'Whatever you do, ban all sports metaphors!' " Landman told him. Raines ignored the advice. "Whenever anyone congratulated Coach Bryant"—he was interrupted by laughter, and paused—"on winning a game, he always said the same thing: 'I didn't play a single down. The team won the game.' " Raines lifted his glass.

Raines knew that the difference between a great coach and a good coach was often a matter of inches. That day, morale soared at the *Times*, but he knew that it might plunge again—as it did a few weeks later, when the newsroom learned that the investigative editor Stephen Engelberg, who won his third Pulitzer this year, was leaving to become a managing editor at the Portland *Oregonian*. The newsroom blamed Raines for losing Engelberg, as it blamed him for losing Kevin Sack—believing that Raines could have done more to keep them. Engelberg had not been happy with Raines last fall, but the strain between them had eased; he told those he trusted that his move had little to do with the new editor, who had offered him a promotion. It was a "life-style decision," Engelberg told friends, explaining that it would be a good situation for his three young daughters, his wife would be working for the *Oregonian* herself, and they would be closer to his wife's family. In an odd way, the seven Pulitzers also worried newsroom veterans. Would Raines become more cocksure?

Raines wasn't happy about these doubts, but he insisted that his focus was on improving his newspaper. "Change always takes people out of their comfort zone," Raines said one evening, over a glass of bourbon and water in his small back room. "I'm not rattled by the friction of the moment. You have to set your sights on a beacon that is a journalistic ideal, and it's important not to get knocked off course by those winds of criticism. The caricature of me that I see in some of these accounts is completely unrecognizable to me. And therefore not particularly disturbing. I know who I am and I know where I will come out." ♦

LETTER FROM KABUL

THE ASSASSINS

Who was involved in the murder of Ahmed Shah Massoud?

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

Ahmed Shah Massoud was a wiry, thin-boned man with a long, handsome face that was distinguished by an aquiline nose and by deep furrows in the cheeks and around the eyes. He usually wore a *pakul*, a kind of flat-topped, soft wool hat that he and his mujahideen had adopted from the Nuristani tribe, a pale-skinned people who claim to be descendants of Alexander the Great's army, in northeastern Afghanistan. In the fall of last year, Massoud was forty-nine years old, and a dramatic white streak had appeared in his dark hair, above his left temple.

Massoud had been at war pretty much steadily since 1975, when he and several other anti-Communist Islamist students made a series of botched attacks on outposts of the government of Mohammad Daud. King Zahir Shah had been overthrown by Daud two years earlier, and Daud himself was ousted and killed in a coup in 1978. In December of 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Massoud was the most charismatic military leader of the decade-long jihad against the Soviets that followed. He was a brilliant tactician, and his popularity helped his party, the Jamiat-i-Islami, take the leading role in the mujahideen government that ruled Afghanistan in the early nineteen-nineties. But no one was able to establish control over the various Afghan political and ethnic factions for very long, and by early September, 2001, the Taliban had pressed Massoud's forces—a coalition of mainly Persian-speaking groups then known as the Northern Alliance—into the northeastern corner of the country. The front line extended from the edge of the Shamali plain, which lies between the Panjshir Valley and Kabul, up to the Tajik border, where Massoud had his headquarters, in a little smugglers' town named Khoja Bahauddin.

That summer, Massoud had begun receiving intelligence reports that a large number of Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters, as many as sixteen thousand, were massing along his northernmost front, among them many Arabs, Pakistanis, Chinese, Uzbeks, and Tajiks. These numbers seemed preposterously inflated, and he dismissed them. Early in September, he and several of his commanders flew over the front line in a helicopter. Massoud sat in the cockpit with binoculars. It was a dangerous trip, one of the men who was with him recalled recently, "but we knew that Allah would help us and that Amur Sahib"—a phrase meaning, more or less, Big Boss, which is what Massoud's men called him—"was with us." They photographed the area, and Massoud instructed his commanders where to position their men.

Massoud stayed up reading Persian poetry aloud with several colleagues until three in the morning on September 9th. A few minutes after he went to sleep, his personal secretary—a young man named Jamshid, who was also his nephew and his brother-in-law—received a call from a Northern Alliance commander, Bismillah Khan, saying that the Taliban had attacked the Shamali front. Jamshid woke Massoud up, and Massoud and Bismillah Khan talked on the phone until daybreak. Then Massoud went back to bed. Around seven-thirty, Jamshid learned that the Taliban were in retreat, and he let his uncle sleep until nine.

After breakfast, Massoud was about to leave on a reconnaissance trip when he decided to see two Arab journalists who had come to Khoja Bahauddin from the Panjshir Valley nine days earlier and had been waiting to interview him. They had sent word that they had to leave Khoja Bahauddin that day. The Arabs had arrived with a letter of introduction from the director of an organization called the Islamic Observation Centre, in London. Jamshid says that he was also contacted by a man who worked for Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, one of the founders of the Afghan Islamist movement, who now commanded a thousand-odd anti-Taliban fighters from a base in the Panjshir. Jamshid was told that the Arabs were friends of Sayyaf's.



In late April, in a military parade in Kab

I asked Jamshid if he had noticed anything unusual about the Arabs, since most Arabs in Afghanistan at the time were associated with Al Qaeda.

"No," he said. And his uncle thought they could be of use. "He wanted to say through them to the Muslim world, 'We are not *kafirs*' "—unbelievers—" 'we are Muslims, and we don't have Russian and Iranians fighting here.' " Massou was religious. He prayed five times a da in the orthodox fashion, and his wi



hmed Shah Massoud's image loomed over Hamid Karzai, the interim President of Afghanistan. Photographs by Thomas Dworzak.

wore a burkha. But he was a Sunni Muslim at war with other Sunni Muslims—the Taliban—and they professed to be righteous and incorruptible, while he had accepted support from Iranian Shiites and from non-Muslim governments.

Fahim Dashty, a slender young man who is now the editor of a multilingual newspaper in Kabul, was also in Khoja Bahauddin on September 9th. Dashty had known Massoud since he was a small boy. In the fall of 1996, when the Taliban took Kabul, Dashty joined Massoud's retreat to the Panjshir Valley. He stayed in Northern Alliance territory and formed a small film company, Ariana, with one of Massoud's commanders. They made documentaries about Massoud's war with the Taliban. Dashty had just come back from a two-month stay in Paris, where he participated in a workshop on film editing sponsored by the group Reporters Without Borders. He stayed in the same guesthouse as the two Arabs. He remembers thinking that it was odd to see Arabs in Northern Alliance territory, but that these two didn't seem suspicious. "They had gone to refugee camps, and to visit prisoners—all the things journalists do," he said. One of them spoke a little French and English, the other only Arabic.

A few weeks ago, I was shown a rough cut of Ariana's most recent film about Massoud. The two Arabs are in some of the scenes. In footage shot in August, they are interviewing Burhanuddin Rabbani, the President of the mujahideen government that had been ousted by the Taliban. The putative reporter is a fair-skinned, muscular man who appears to be in his mid-thirties. He is clean-shaven and has a crewcut. He wears Western clothes—a brown shirt and slacks—and glasses. He has two odd brownish marks, like round scars, on his forehead. The cameraman isn't visible in this scene, but later in the film there is a still shot of him

in the doorway of the guesthouse. He is tall and dark-skinned. He is wearing a black shirt and is glaring at the camera, with what one can easily imagine is both hate and fear.

The Ariana team usually filmed Massoud's interviews, and around noon on September 9th Fahim Dashty and the two Arabs and their translator drove over to Massoud's headquarters. Massoud and Jamshid were there with two other men—the chief of security, whose office was being used for the interview, and Massoud Khalili, the Northern Alliance's ambassador to India. Ahmed Shah Massoud was sitting on a sofa, using an orthopedic cushion that helped alleviate his chronic back pain. He said hello to the Arabs. "He asked them where they were from," Dashty said. "One of them said they were Belgian but were born in Morocco, and that they had come from Pakistan to Kabul and from there to Khoja Bahauddin."

Ambassador Khalili recalled that Massoud told the Arab who was to conduct the interview that he would like to hear the list of questions first, and the man began to read them out in English. Khalili translated into Persian for Massoud. He said that he was rather surprised that most of the questions had to do with Osama bin Laden—for example, "What will you do with Osama bin Laden if you take power?" and "Why do you call him a fundamentalist?" The Ambassador found the questions tendentious, and he asked the Arab what paper he worked for. "I am not a journalist," the man replied. "I am from the Islamic centers. We have offices in London and Paris and all over the world." Khalili turned to Massoud and whispered, "Commander, they are from those guys"—meaning Al Qaeda or some other Muslim extremist group. Massoud nodded, and said, tersely, "Let's just get through with it."

The Arabs had moved a table and some chairs that were between Massoud and their camera, which they had positioned on the lowest level of the tripod. Dashty, who had set up his camera behind theirs, began filming. He was adjusting his backlight when the room exploded. Ambassador Khalili said that he saw a thick blue fire coming toward him.

"I felt I was burning," Dashty said. He went outside and saw Jamshid, who had left the room with the chief of security a few minutes earlier. "I asked him to take me to the hospital, and he asked me where Mr. Massoud was, and I went back inside and saw him. He was very badly injured all over his body, his face, his hands and legs." An Afghan intelligence officer told me recently that Massoud must have died within thirty seconds. Two pieces of metal were lodged in his heart. Most of the fingers of his right hand had been blown off. I was shown a photograph of his body. Every other inch of his skin was ruptured in open wounds. White gauze had been stuffed into his eye sockets.

The cameraman's battery belt had been packed with explosives. The sofa that Massoud had been sitting on was charred, and a hole had been blasted through the back. In the Ariana film, there is a shot of the cameraman's body on a stretcher. His legs are scorched and bloody and the upper part of his body seems to have been blown apart. The Afghan translator was also killed.

Two bodyguards carried Massoud to his car. Dashty, who was badly burned, got in, and they drove to the helicopter pad. Ambassador Khalili, who was also burned and had been hit heavily by shrapnel, followed in another car. They were all flown to a hospital across the border in Tajikistan, where General Fahim, Massoud's second-in-command, soon arrived. Fahim conferred with other Northern Alliance officials, and they agreed that the assassination should be kept a secret for the time being.

The Arab who did the interviewing had survived the blast and was put in a room nearby. He tore the wire-mesh screen from a small window and wriggled through, then ran across a graveyard to a steep river embankment a few hundred yards away. A man who worked for a local warlord chased him and killed him.

I asked Dashty if he believed that Massoud had been betrayed. "Yes," he said. "It would have been impossible otherwise. Somehow, I think, there was contact between Al Qaeda and our guys."

On September 11th, at around 8 P.M. in Afghanistan, Mullah Omar, who was in Kandahar, called the Taliban foreign minister in Kabul. According to Afghan intelligence sources, who intercepted the call, Mullah Omar said, "Things have gone much further than expected." It was 11:30 A.M. in New York, less than three hours after American Airlines Flight 11 had crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center, and an hour and a half after the south tower had collapsed. Mullah Omar told the foreign minister to call a press conference to say that the Taliban had not been involved in the attack. The press conference took place at 9:30 P.M. in Kabul. The foreign minister assured reporters that Afghanistan had not attacked the United States, and he read a statement by Mullah Omar saying that Osama bin Laden was not involved: "This type of terrorism is too great for one man."

Among the calls intercepted that night was one from Kabul to Kandahar. "Where's the Sheikh?" the caller asked. Sheikh was the code name that senior Taliban officials used for Osama bin Laden. Again according to Afghan intelligence sources, someone in Mullah Omar's house told the caller that bin Laden was there. "Then, afterward," an intelligence officer said to me, "there was a chaos of phone calls back and forth between Kandahar and Kabul."

It seemed obvious during those early days in September that the assassination of Massoud on the ninth and the attack on the World Trade Center two days later were somehow related, but exactly how they were related and who was involved continues to be the subject of speculation. Massoud's younger brother, Wali, was in London when he was killed. Wali was the chargé d'affaires at the Afghan Embassy, which was still run by the Rabbani government. Wali is now in Kabul, and has been nominated to lead a Massoudist party, the National Movement of Afghanistan. He believes that the assassination of his brother was the first step in a larger plot, and that the attacks on September 11th were the second step. "Look at the logic," he says. "They wanted to do what they wanted to do on the eleventh, but provided there was no Massoud." The people who killed Massoud assumed that his death would destroy the Northern Alliance, and that if the Americans retaliated for the attacks on the World Trade Center they would have no Afghan allies on the ground. The buildup of troops on the front line in the late summer and early fall wa

then, preparation for Massoud's assassination. "They were waiting for something," an Afghan intelligence official said. And, of course, as can be seen from Mullah Omar's phone conversation, the attacks on the United States were not expected to be as catastrophic as they turned out to be. "They were expecting a reaction," the intelligence official said. "But they thought it would be a Clinton-type reaction. They didn't anticipate the kind of revenge that occurred."

The foreign troops that were prepared to overrun a demoralized Northern Alliance were also, it appears, to have been sent further north, into Central Asia. In the ensuing chaos, an attack on Osama bin Laden and the Taliban would have been difficult. But since the official story was, at first, that Massoud had only been wounded, the Northern Alliance held its ground.

The "terrorists," which is the word that Afghans commonly use to refer to Al Qaeda, had strategic as well as tactical reasons for wanting to kill Massoud. Their most stalwart enemy had begun to gain support outside the country. In April of last year, Massoud was invited to speak to the European Parliament in Strasbourg. He gave a press conference in Paris and met with European officials there and in Brussels. "He behaved like a statesman and was received as a statesman," Wali says. "The media took an interest in him—except for the American media. I think this was a turning point. He warned the international community that Al Qaeda was dangerous, not only to Afghanistan but to the world."

Wali and other Afghans I talked to insisted that Pakistan was also involved in Massoud's murder. Massoud had never established close links with the Pakistanis, even in the seventies and eighties, when many Afghan Islamists went into exile in Pakistan. (He was legendary as a fighter in part because he stayed in Afghanistan, in the field.) The I.S.I., the Pakistani security services, supported the Taliban early on. An intelligence officer who was close to Massoud said that on the night of September 9th the President of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf, held a party to celebrate the assassination. He said that this information came from General Fahim, who is now minister of defense in the interim Afghan government headed by Hamid Karzai. I asked Fahim if there had been such a party, and he was evasive. "Maybe," he said. But he confirmed that Musharraf was at I.S.I. headquarters that evening, meeting with Hamid Gul, the former head of the I.S.I., who had just returned from northern Afghanistan. I asked Fahim what he felt when he met Musharraf recently in Kabul. He had shaken his hand. "Sometimes, for the sake of the greater interest," Fahim said, "one has to take a cup of poison."

Massoud's assassins were Tunisians, not Moroccans, as they had claimed. One of them had lived in Belgium, and they carried Belgian passports that had been stolen and altered, and letters of introduction with the signature of Yassir al-Sirri, the director of the Islamic Observation Centre, in London. The stamps on the passports indicated that the Arabs had arrived in Islamabad, Pakistan, on July 25th, where they were given visas by the Taliban embassy, and that they went from there to Kabul. There are two principal theories about their movements. One, which an Afghan intelligence officer called "the theory of our foreign friends"—presumably the British, the Americans, and the French—holds that the passports were forged in Europe by Al Qaeda. The assassins also carried employment identification cards from the Islamic Observation Centre, and, according to the "foreign" theory, they met with Yassir al-Sirri in London. The second theory, the "Afghan theory," is that the passports were forged in Afghanistan. Many similar passports were found when the Taliban fled. This theory holds that the two Arabs had been living in Afghanistan.

The assassins entered the Panjshir Valley under the auspices of the Northern Alliance leader Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, who says that in mid-August he was contacted by an Egyptian who had fought with him in the jihad against the Soviets. The man said that he was calling from Bosnia. He asked Sayyaf to help two Arab journalists who wanted to interview him and Massoud and President Rabbani. Engineer Muhammad Aref ("engineer" is a common Afghan honorific, indicating that someone is educated and has studied engineering), who is now the head of the Afghan intelligence services, was Massoud's chief of security; it was in his office that the assassination took place. Aref says that Sayyaf's imprimatur permitted the Arabs to bypass normal security procedures. "They came not as journalists but as guests," Aref says. "Sayyaf and Bismillah



"I'm old. What's good for that?"

Khan"—the commander of the Shamali front line—"sent their men and cars to pick them up. Everybody helped them, and they met lots of people."

Maulana Atta Rahman Salim, a deputy minister in Karzai's interim government, is a respected Muslim scholar and cleric. He had an office in Khoja Bahauddin last fall and travelled to the Panjshir Valley with Massoud a week before the assassination. Rahman says that recriminations were voiced almost immediately after Massoud was killed. "Everyone began saying, 'Why weren't the terrorists searched more carefully? Why didn't people do their jobs better?' The accusations focussed on Sayyaf more than anyone else, and an Iranian newspaper published the suspicions."

Sayyaf is an Islamic fundamentalist, a Wahhabi, who is closely associated with the global terrorists who were nurtured during the Afghan jihad in the eighties. Like Rabbani, he studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo, where he was influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood. Both he and Rabbani taught Islamic studies at Kabul University in the early seventies. They were among the founders of the Islamist movement that became the principal opposition to the Soviets. Sayyaf, who is a Pashtun, spoke Arabic fluently, and early on he became close to the Saudis. After the Communist takeover of Afghanistan in the late seventies, when the Saudis began to fund various Afghan resistance movements, Sayyaf received an inordinate share of the largesse. He formed a political party, the Ittihad-i-Islami, or Islamic Union, in 1981, and four years later founded a university in an Afghan refugee camp near Peshawar. He was allied with Massoud and Rabbani, but they differed on many things. Massoud was a more moderate Muslim than the others.

Sayyaf's university was called Dawa'a al-Jihad, which means Convert and

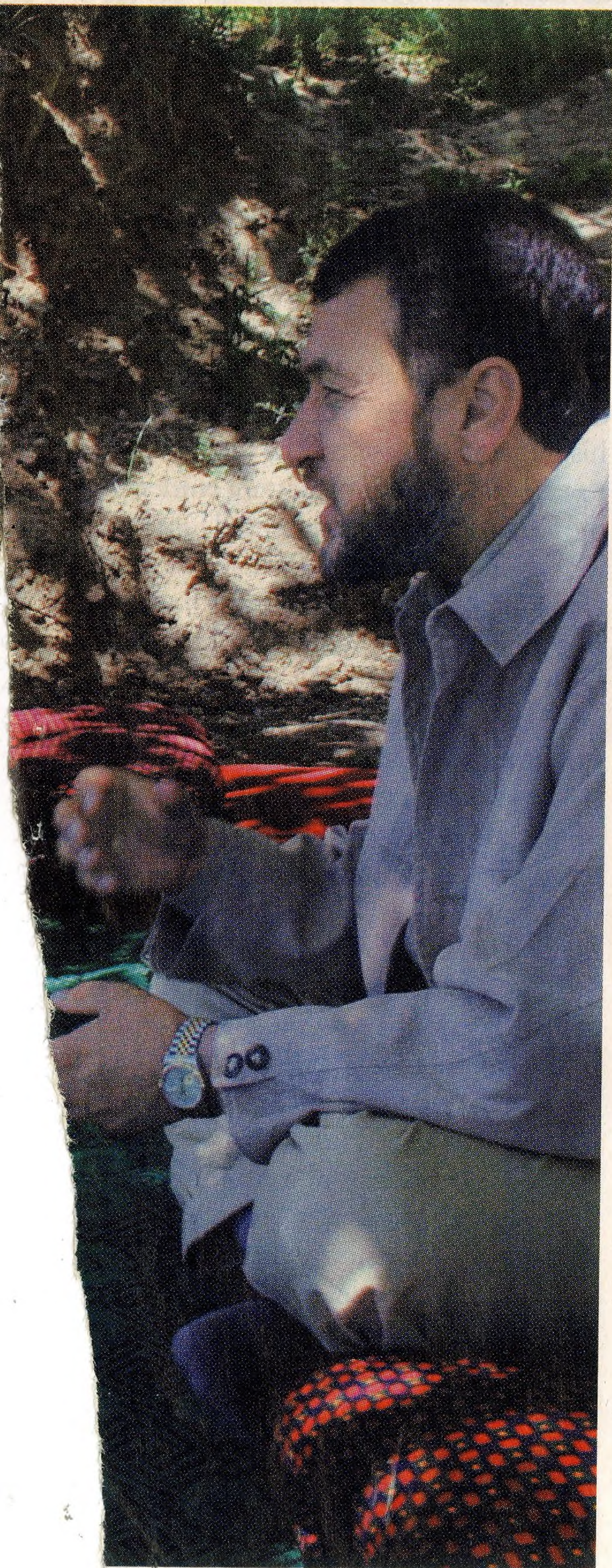


MAGNUM

Abdul Rasul Sayyaf (center) made it possible for Massoud's assassins to enter Northern Alliance territory. Bismillah Khan (far right

Struggle, and it became known as the preëminent "school for terrorism." Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, who is serving a life sentence in a federal prison in Colorado for masterminding the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, attended Dawa'a al-Jihad and fought with Sayyaf's mujahideen. Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, the blind Egyptian cleric who is in the same prison, serving a life sentence for seditious conspiracy to blow up various New York City landmarks (not including the World Trade Center, although he is suspected of having been involved in the first bombing of that, too), lectured in the camps around Peshawar in the mid-eighties. Osama bin Laden supported Sayyaf financially and led a brigade of Arab fighters who used Sayyaf's base in Afghanistan. The I.S.I. provided military and intelligence expertise. When the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 and many of the foreign jihadis moved on, a group of Ittihad members—some of them native Filipinos and some of them Arabs—formed the Abu Sayyaf terrorist organization in the Philippines.

In October, Yassir al-Sirri, of the Islamic Observation Centre, was arrested in London for his role in the preparation of the letters of introduction for the two Arab assassins. (These charges were dismissed by a British court early in May, but he was immediately rearrested, in response to an extradition request by the United States.) In April, in New York, Ahmed Abdel Sattar, a U.S. Postal Service employee who lives on Staten Island, was arrested and charged with being a "surrogate" for Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman. Sattar had worked for the sheikh as a paralegal during his conspiracy trial in New York in the mid-nineties. The indictment said that Sattar was serving as a "communications facility" for the sheikh—that is, passing on his orders from jail. Sattar's phone had been tapped for some time, and among the calls scrutinized were several between him and Yassir al-Sirri in London.



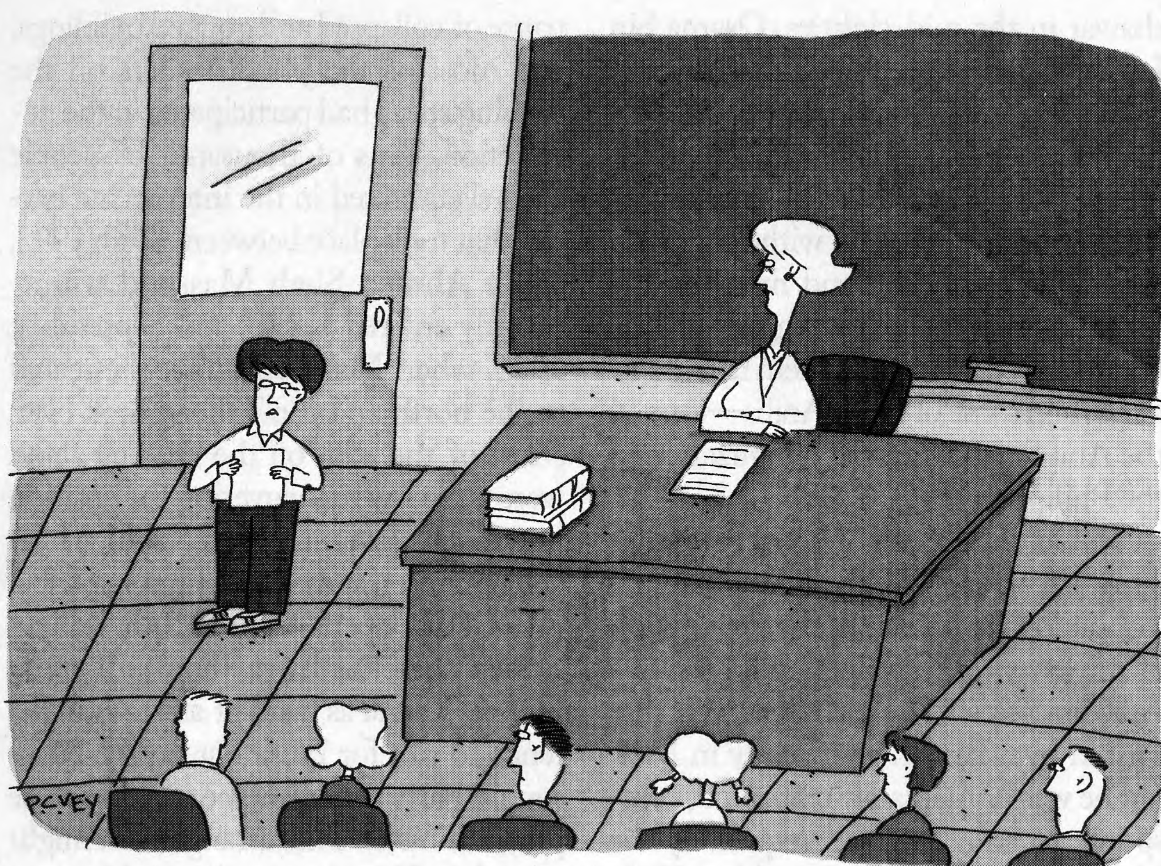
...und the Panjshir Valley.

Abdul Rasul Sayyaf is a big, beefy man with fair skin and a thick gray beard. He must be about six feet three and weighs probably two hundred and fifty pounds. He usually wears a white skullcap or a large turban, and a traditional Afghan *shalwar kameez*, a tunic with loose pants. Wali Massoud is slight and clean-shaven. He usually wears slacks and a sports jacket. His dark hair is parted on one side, and it often flops about boyishly. On April 28th, during a parade in Kabul to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the mujahideen's entry into the city and their victory over the Soviet-backed government there, Wali and Sayyaf were sitting together on a V.I.P. viewing stand across the street from the Eid Mosque, a long, low, pale-yellow-and-green building with a yellow dome.

The V.I.P.s looked out over a Daliesque panorama of wholesale destruction. Southern Kabul is a desolate expanse of collapsed and gouged buildings, and most of the jihadi leaders on the viewing stand had participated in the destruction. Tens of thousands of people were slaughtered in the internecine battles that took place between April, 1992, when Ahmed Shah Massoud triumphantly entered Kabul, and September, 1996, when Massoud's forces retreated to the north and the Taliban took over. Most of the men on the viewing stand were also now maneuvering for position in the new government in Kabul, which will be chosen at the Loya Jirga, the tribal council that opens on June 10th. It is assumed that the Loya Jirga will ratify Hamid Karzai as head of state. Wali intends to run for President on the Massoudist party ticket, and he could become prime minister. That arrangement might appeal to Karzai, since it would assure him the continued support of the Three Panjshiris—Defense Minister Fahim, Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, and Interior Minister Younus Qanouni—who grew up in the Panjshir Valley and were close to Massoud, and are the leading figures in the new configuration of the old Northern Alliance faction of ethnic Tajiks.

Karzai sat at the center of the front row of dignitaries, in a gray silk collarless shirt and a gray *chapan*, a finely woven Afghan robe. General Fahim was on his right, resplendent in a medal-bedecked uniform and peaked cap. General Fahim was now officially Marshal Fahim, having received a sudden promotion the night before. A number of other mujahideen commanders loyal to Fahim had also been promoted. (A few days later, I asked one of President Karzai's Afghan-American advisers if the promotions were Karzai's idea. "They forced him to do it," the man said. "He had no choice." We were talking in a parking lot, because, the adviser explained to me, the Intercontinental Hotel, where he and several other members of Karzai's government live, is bugged: "They're in the curtains.")

Patriotic music began blaring from loudspeakers, and Karzai and Fahim left the viewing stand and got into two convertible Russian military jeeps. The jeeps were driven past squads of soldiers who stood at attention in the great plaza in front of the mosque. Karzai waved at the soldiers and Fahim saluted stiffly, the tips



"'No More School: A Dream Unfulfilled,' by Howard Willocoski."

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of his fingers almost touching the beak of his outsized marshal's hat. Meanwhile, a master of ceremonies and a poet took turns at the microphone. "Whoever attacks Afghanistan will weep, just as Britain and Russia did," the master of ceremonies said. Karzai and Fahim returned to the viewing stand, and Fahim made a speech about how the mujahideen had vanquished the Soviets and the Taliban. He didn't mention the American bombing campaign. A float moved slowly down the avenue, bearing a huge portrait of Massoud in white safari clothes, his arms thoughtfully folded. Karzai announced that Massoud was henceforth Afghanistan's official National Hero.

Scores of Russian tanks and armored personnel carriers rumbled past bearing framed portraits of Massoud and Karzai. They were followed by disabled jihadi veterans in blue-gray tunics, on crutches and in wheelchairs. Behind the veterans came one marching platoon after another of mujahideen, organized according to their home provinces, with Massoud's Panjshiris in the lead. A parachutist floated down from a helicopter, intending to land in front of the mosque, but he missed his target and drifted off into the ruins in the distance. Fifteen minutes later, he showed up on the back of a motorbike, his parachute billowing behind him. A second parachutist, a woman this time, headed for the plaza, and she, too, disappeared into the ruins but soon reappeared, marching by to applause, and carrying a carpet decorated with Massoud's image.

As the parade ended, I made my way past the front of the viewing stand, close enough to see Sayyaf lean over and say something to Wali Massoud. Wali sat bolt upright in his chair. He nodded his head and smiled unconvincingly.

At the meeting of Afghan delegations in Bonn late last year, at which Karzai's interim government was set up, two of Sayyaf's deputies were given minor ministerial positions. Apparently, Sayyaf was reasonably happy with this arrangement, and he agreed to withdraw his gunmen from Kabul and to establish a command base in his home town of Paghman, an hour's drive into the mountains northwest of the city. His militia controls all the territory between Paghman and the suburbs of Kabul, ending just a few hundred metres from the Intercontinental Hotel.

In March, the I.S.A.F., the international security force in Afghanistan, accused Sayyaf's militiamen of carrying out several robberies and killings in the western suburbs, where many of the city's minority ethnic Shia Muslims, the Hazaras, live. Sayyaf denied the accusations. As with most such incidents in Afghanistan, the investigation of this one appears to have fizzled away inconclusively. There is a lot of bad history between Sayyaf and the Hazaras. In the mid-nineties, Sayyaf's troops massacred thousands of Hazara civilians in Kabul. According to Human Rights Watch, his militia became renowned for a particularly gruesome method of dispatching its enemies—herding them into metal shipping containers and then setting fires beneath them, to roast them alive.

I had met Sayyaf for the first time a little more than a week before the parade, in his headquarters in Paghman. We sat on a red carpet under a walnut tree on a grassy, terraced hillside. He had a couple of friends with him, and a dozen or so armed bodyguards stood a short distance away. We talked for a while, and I told Sayyaf that I had been in Jalalabad in 1989, when the mujahideen—among them hundreds of Arab Wahhabi fighters recruited by Sayyaf—had laid siege to the city. He asked me why I had not come to his camp, which was off the road leading to Jalalabad from the Pakistani border, in the Khyber Pass. I didn't remind him that in those days his virulently anti-Western views had made him off limits to most foreign journalists, many of whom had been terrorized by his Wahhabi friends. I just said that I had not had very good contacts. He nodded.

When I got up to leave, I saw a group of men walking toward me. One of them, who was surrounded by gunmen, was then-General Fahim's brother. We nodded to one another.

The day after the parade, I met Sayyaf at his house in the northwestern suburbs of Kabul, in a neighborhood that had been devastated in the fighting between his men and the Hazaras in the mid-nineties. Sayyaf was in a meeting in an upstairs room, and as it broke up I saw that one of the men with him was a mujahideen commander whose forces had helped take Kunduz from the Taliban in November. Sayyaf introduced him to me as the new governor of Kabul province. When the other men left, we sat in the living room and he talked about himself. His father died when he was six, and he attended a madrasah in Paghman, and then the University of Kabul, where

Burhanuddin Rabbani had been his teacher. Sayyaf was lecturing in Islamic studies when Daud overthrew the King, and the Communists began to take over the government. He was in prison for nearly six years because of his Islamist activities, and then in exile in Pakistan. He claimed that he had spent most of the war years in Afghanistan, which gave him more legitimacy as a leader than some others had. And he said that he had been unjustly accused of being abusive: "Islam taught me to be kind to people."

After I met with Sayyaf a few times, he became unavailable. He was too ill to see me, or too busy, or I should call back tomorrow. And then the phone was switched off. So one hot Sunday morning in the middle of May I drove up to Paghman with one of Sayyaf's Ittihad fighters, a number of whom are bivouacked at a villa he owns in Wazir Akbar Khan, a relatively pleasant residential neighborhood in Kabul. It would have been difficult to get anywhere near Sayyaf without one of his men as an escort. The road between Paghman and Kabul is considered unsafe by late afternoon; several armed robberies and murders have occurred along it in recent months.

We stopped at a junction in the track where there was a sentry hut and a dozen or so fighters. I gave one of them my business card with a note scribbled on the back of it, addressed to Sayyaf, and the man took it and walked off toward an orchard a hundred metres or so in front of us. He came back in a few minutes and motioned us to drive on. Sayyaf was seated with several other men under the walnut tree where we had had our first conversation. One of the men was General Bismillah Khan, the Northern Alliance commander who had escorted the Arab assassins on excursions to the front lines when they were in the Panjshir Valley in August, posing as journalists. Bismillah Khan is now in charge of Kabul's military defenses.

I apologized for my intrusion, and said it was good that both Sayyaf and Bismillah Khan were there, since I wished to talk to them both. "As I am sure you know," I said to Sayyaf, "there are those who have expressed doubts about your relationship with Massoud's assassins, because they first came into the Northern Alliance territory through you." Sayyaf's eyes narrowed, and he stared hard at me. He translated what I had said to Bismillah Khan, who speaks no English, and then he turned and said to me, in English that seemed much more halting than during our previous meetings, that they had let the Arabs in so that they could see that they were good Muslims, and that their forces had not been tainted by Westerners.

Bismillah Khan began speaking in Persian, and Sayyaf translated. Khan said that in retrospect the two Arabs behaved suspiciously, but he had not noticed this at the time. "Now, when I think about them, I remember that they had had beards but had recently shaved them off. The marks of the beards were still there." He moved his hands along his jawline to show what he meant. Sayyaf chuckled and said that the Arabs had been very nervous whenever they were in a car. "If they went with our people to the bunkers"—at the Shamali front line—"they would say, 'Please go slowly, because of our cameras; we don't want them to be damaged.' Before the car moved, they always put the cameras on their knees and told the driver to be careful."

I asked Sayyaf how the two Arabs had come to be with him in the first place. He described the phone call from the former jihadi—"an Arab from Egypt, Abu Hani"—who said he was in Bosnia and wanted Sayyaf to help the putative journalists get an interview with Massoud. Sayyaf also described a meeting of most of the Northern Alliance leadership that took place in the Panjshir Valley while the Arabs were there. He said that the Arabs had tried to come into the meeting room but had been stopped by guards. "They wanted to carry out their plan there," he said. "They wanted to eliminate all the leaders of the resistance." Bismillah Khan said something in Persian, and Sayyaf translated it as a comment about Sayyaf telling Massoud and Bismillah Khan that he had doubts about the Arabs and warning Massoud not to see them. Sayyaf threw up his hands to indicate that he had done all he could.



My final meeting with Sayyaf took place three days later, in another of his houses, off the road leading from Kabul to Paghman. He wasn't there when I arrived, but he soon drove up, in a convoy of Land Cruisers full of armed men. We sat in the living room with several aides and a general from Paktia province who was visiting. I asked Sayyaf to describe his vision of the future of Afghanistan, and he spoke about the importance of an Islamic state, and about closely following the teachings of the Koran and not trying to introduce new ideas—the fundamentalist line. Then he brought up the betrayal of Afghanistan by the West in the early nineties, after the Soviets had retreated. "Once the Afghans kicked out the Red Army, the Western countries cut their backing." he said. "They had been supporting us only for their own interests."

I asked him about Osama bin Laden and the other Arabs whom he had known well and who had fought alongside him against the Russians. Osama had regarded Sayyaf as a father figure, had he not? Sayyaf smiled, and took off his turban and placed it on the sofa next to him. His hands were trembling. "I want to tell you frankly about those who became extremists," he said. "No one can name one example of harm done by those men when they were with us in the jihad. We were not extremists, and neither were they. But later, when Osama and his friends were brought to help the Taliban, who *were* extremists, they began to harm the world. I want to ask you, who brought Osama?"

Sayyaf was agitated. He sat on the edge of the sofa and leaned forward. He was expressing a conspiracy theory that is not uncommon in Kabul, even among reasonably sophisticated Afghans who have visited the West: that the Americans, with the aid of Pakistan, supported the Taliban and Osama bin Laden so that they could justify an invasion and take over the country. "The extremists backed by the foreigners were able to attack us," Sayyaf said. "We were the victims." His aides and the general from Paktia nodded in agreement. "I know that Osama and the Taliban did the assassination," Sayyaf said. "But who was